

Gates priest linked to sex abuse

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GATES — Gates police have charged a priest at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Gates with four misdemeanors involving a 12-year-old girl.

Father John J. Steger, 80, was arrested Wednesday and ac-



Steger

cused of inappropriately touching the girl in late April and early May.

Steger was charged with two counts of second degree sexual abuse and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

"This is an especially sad

and difficult case," said Gates Police Chief Tom Roche, who knew Steger personally and had previously attended the church. "It's always difficult especially when there is a child involved."

Police learned of the allegation after the girl reported the two incidents to her parents. The parents contacted the Roman

Catholic Diocese of Rochester, who then contacted the police.

"It's a credit to the parents that the child felt very comfortable telling mom and dad what happened," said Roche.

The alleged incidents occurred in the rectory, adjacent to the church building,

PRIEST, PAGE 2B

Priest

FROM PAGE 1B

4100 Lyell Road.

Roche said the allegations involved inappropriate touching.

Steger, a priest of the diocese since 1951, has been placed on administrative leave. He has served as pastor of St. Jude since 1968 and previously at St. Theodore Church in Gates.

An apartment complex diagonal to the church bears Steger's name. He has no criminal record.

Steger will appear at Gates Town Court Wednesday.

Gates supervisor Ralph Esposito said "I think it's an unfortunate incident if the charges are correct." Steger was also a member of the Gates Fire Commissioners.

Another Monroe County Roman Catholic priest, Dennis R. Sewar, was arrested last year and charged with fondling a 14-year old boy. Sewar, 55, is charged with a misdemeanor of third-degree sexual abuse. □

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Includes reporting by staff writer Fernando Diaz.